

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PAPER

FROM CONTAINMENT TO COMBATING  
TERRORISM: THE EVOLUTION AND  
APPLICATION OF A POST COLD WAR STRATEGY

by

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## ABSTRACT

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The U.S. national strategy for the Global War on Terror has strategic roots back to our national strategy to contain the Soviet Union. Changes to our strategy have been incremental and evolutionary, remaining within a geostrategic, regionally based paradigm that provides continuity. Our declaration that global terrorism is the number one threat is certainly different; unforeseen before 9/11. But our analysis of that threat and how to deal with it conforms to earlier views of combating terrorism. We define the global terrorist jihadists as a fundamentally different enemy. They combine corrupted ancient beliefs with modern technology and are organized in an information age network structure. Yet we assume that, if we pressure this enemy in multiple regions around the world, they will return to traditional modes of operation on smaller regional and national scales where they can be completely eradicated. This is fundamentally unchanged from our Cold War notions of how to combat state sponsored terrorism. The evidence of the last few years indicates that the enemy will not “de-globalize”, but will evolve into something else, continuing to operate globally. We need to understand the traditional assumptions of terrorism that drive our strategy and define a new way ahead.



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## FROM CONTAINMENT TO COMBATING TERRORISM: THE EVOLUTION AND APPLICATION OF A POST COLD WAR STRATEGY

The U.S. national strategy for the Global War on Terror (GWOT), outlined in both the National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2002 and supporting National Strategy to Combat Terrorism (NSCT) is both criticized and lauded as significantly departing from previous U.S. national strategies. Proponents argue that this is a new, globalized, information-age world with a new, transnational terrorist threat, requiring a revolutionary, information age strategy to defeat it. Critics warn that such a significant departure from previous strategy is dangerous and counterproductive, sacrificing peaceful globalizing cooperation to assert superpower hegemony. How, they ask, can the United States be an international leader if it is perceived as lacking a stable, predictable security strategy that transcends domestic politics and presidential elections? A careful review of the development of U.S. national strategy indicates that both sides may be arguing the wrong point.

### MODERN TERRORISM: THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The NSS 2002 is not really a revolutionary departure from the past and neither is its implementation through the application of U.S. instruments of national power. Instead of arguing its revolutionary differences, strategists should be examining its evolutionary sameness. Although the rallying cry is "War on Terrorism", NSS 2002 outlines a host of security threats and challenges for the future. These are not radically different from the ones in previous NSS versions and conform to the regional strategic approach also developed in preceding strategies. The larger design of the strategy envisions an effort towards a peaceful, prosperous, free world. This grand strategy, or "Higher Realism", as Robert Kagan calls it,<sup>1</sup> is concerned with global issues like democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech and worship, respect for private property and for the rights of women and minorities. These are the "nonnegotiable demands of human dignity."<sup>2</sup>

In his January, 2005 Inaugural address, Bush does not mention terrorism. Instead, in reference to the attacks of September 11, 2001, "a day of fire", he talks about world regions that "simmer in resentment and tyranny - prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder....and raise a mortal threat." He goes on to state that "it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."<sup>3</sup> Bush's rhetoric echoes that of previous presidents and the principles of his grand strategy are strongly rooted in traditional

concepts of threat containment and regional geostrategy that go back fifty years to National Security Council directive 68 (NSC 68).

What, then, is the role of terrorism in the development and application of U.S. strategy? As Bush implies, terrorism is a symptom of larger security issues. It is a political pathology, deeply rooted in modern conditions, and its cycles of expression in the twentieth century have reflected critical periods of societal change. A doctor presented with a particularly painful symptom must correctly diagnose the underlying condition leading to the symptom, and prescribe medications that treat both. Strategists must study terrorism in the same way. Studies of global terrorism generally begin with al Qaeda, and then go on to a regional focus on the Middle East. Policy reviews generally seem to begin and end with the Middle East, as well. A different picture emerges if we examine the development of U.S. strategy as part of a strategic continuum, within which terrorism has played a role.

### **STRATEGIC CONTAINMENT I: FROM SUPERPOWER TO REGIONAL CONFLICT**

It is easy, given the fifty year time difference, to see significant differences in NSC 68 and NSS 2002 that may not really be as dramatic as we think, once we look at the entire historical record. Analyzing the development of our strategy from Containment to the GWOT, then looking at our strategic understanding of terrorism leads to several significant observations that might not otherwise be apparent. First, our strategy is based on a regional view of the world that remains fundamentally unchanged. Second, our strategy to fight the global terrorist jihad is derived from the same strategy we used to fight the perceived Soviet sponsored terrorist threat. Finally, though we have made significant gains in dismantling al Qaeda, we are hampered by a strategic view of terrorism within a cold war context that allows the enemy to change faster than we can adjust.

The regional focus of the Cold War strategy revolved around the global bi-polar power structure, which dictated the majority of American power, is clustered to contain the main Soviet threat in one region, with peripheral engagements in other regions to counter Soviet expansionism. R. Craig Nation writes that “Regional conflict was a significant part of cold war competition, but it too was usually interpreted in a global perspective, as a projection of superpower rivalry into peripheral regions on the shoulders of proxy forces.”<sup>14</sup> U.S. strategy post Cold War progressively relies more heavily on regional strategies, as the perceived security threat becomes more widely dispersed. A review of the Reagan Doctrine of the 1980’s and subsequent NSS documents demonstrates the evolution of an increasingly multi-regional strategy within a relatively consistent American strategic outlook.

As Snider and Nagl point out, the National Security Strategies of the 1980's were first efforts to write a NSS and did not completely capture the U.S. strategy of the time.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. strategy leading up to the end of the Cold War is best enunciated in the Reagan Doctrine, laid out in speeches and the over 300 National Security Decision Directives (NSDD) published during his two administrations. Reagan's strategy to counter the Soviet threat went beyond containment to engagement wherever necessary. Essentially, he articulated the intent to counter Soviet influence wherever it might occur. Subsequent NSDD's outlined policies towards particular regions. These were not issued as a result of a conscious regional strategy, but in an ad hoc fashion over the next eight years, as a perceived need arose.

Three unchanging aspects of the Reagan Doctrine were its moral outlook, defense of certain values as universal, and pledge of U.S. power to extend those values to other nations. These tenets echo introductory statements in both NSC 68 and NSS 2002 and demonstrate a vital continuity within U.S. strategy. In a 1982 speech to the British Parliament, President Reagan laid out the tenets of his emerging doctrine. Included is a remarkable passage that could just as easily have come from one of President Bush's speeches:

"The objective I propose is quite simple to state: to foster the infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities, which allows a people to choose their own way to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means. This is not cultural imperialism; it is providing the means for genuine self-determination and protection for diversity. Democracy already flourishes in countries with very different cultures and historical experiences. It would be cultural condescension, or worse, to say that any people prefer dictatorship to democracy."<sup>6</sup>

Strategy is not just about how we characterize others (friends, enemies, neutral, threat, etc.), but also about how we characterize ourselves and perceive our relationship with the rest of the world. As Reagan's speech shows, our self-perception has changed very little in post Cold War years and, I am sure one may argue, for a much longer period than that. This self-perception forms the basis for the continuity of our strategy in the face of a changing security environment.

By the early 1990's strategists begin to develop regional strategies in more detail, as a useful way to combine U.S. world primacy with a perception of more dispersed security threats. The geopolitical boundaries of defined regions do not change, nor do our fundamental assumptions about the cultures and problems in each region. Instead, we begin to more fully articulate the security threats and our engagement of those threats on a regional basis. However, our focus is still bi-polar. NSS 1991 discusses the threat in each region, but devotes

the majority of space to the Soviet Union and Europe; Asia and the Pacific coming second, with the Western Hemisphere, the Middle East and Africa distant thirds.

By the end of the 1990's, U.S. security concerns had completely shifted to regional conflict as an organizing paradigm. As Nation points out, both the NSS and Quadrennial Defense Reviews (QDR) of 1997 cite regional instability as a major security concern.<sup>7</sup> One of the unifying themes throughout the NSS is a U.S. strategy of "collective engagement", articulated with respect to world regions.

The Bush NSS of 2002 set a regionalized security strategy within a global context. By naming transnational terrorism as the single greatest threat, it is the first post Cold War strategy to designate a single, non Soviet threat as our premier concern. It points to the importance of international organizations and alliances and names economic globalization as a critical imperative for world stability. The NSS then goes on to state that we will work with regional organizations and concentrate on defusing regional conflicts to implement the strategy. Most significantly, it states that the way to defeat global terrorism is through regional strategies.<sup>8</sup> The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (NSCT) goes even further, stating that the Department of State will lead the development of specific regional strategies for the defeat of terrorism.<sup>9</sup>

### **STRATEGIC CONTAINMENT II: FROM STATE SPONSORED TO TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM**

NSS 2002 prescribes a regional strategic approach built on traditional U.S. geostrategic assumptions. If a regional strategic approach is nothing radically new, then perhaps our so-called war on terror is just an expanded attempt on earlier efforts to stamp out terrorism. But if we trace the development of our strategy to combat terrorism, it follows an evolutionary pattern consistent with the development of our regional strategic focus. However, as Zbigniew Brzezinski dryly points out, "One does not wage a war against a technique or a tactic. No one, for instance, would have declared at the outset of World War II that the war was being fought against 'blitzkrieg'."<sup>10</sup> Although the strategy against terrorism evolves predictably, our pre-9/11 definition of the terror perpetrators does not account for an independent, non-state threat.

NSC 68 and early Cold War strategies do not mention terrorism. Terrorism first enters the U.S. strategic lexicon during the Reagan administration, concurrent with our expanding regional focus. In 1984 Reagan published National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 138 to respond to an increasing number of terrorist attacks against U.S. citizens and infrastructure, most notably the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon. In July 1985 he published NSDD 176, entitled "Combating Terrorism in Central America", focusing on El Salvador, and in the same

month convened the Task Force on Combating Terrorism, chaired by the Vice President. The task force published its findings in January, 1986. The terrorist threat described clearly emanated from nation states. Terrorism was a tactic used by state actors to destabilize governments and attack U.S. interests abroad. True to the Cold War mentality, terrorism was generally seen as an indirect tactic of the Soviet Union to extend its influence into Third World regions.

The strategic focus on state supported terrorism also characterizes the strategy of the '90's, although the emphasis changes. The states sponsoring terrorism become regional actors, attempting to extend their influence and counter the U.S. in their particular region. NSS 1991 only mentions terrorism a few times, as part of vague groupings of transnational threats such drugs, proliferation of advanced weapons, AIDS and environmental degradation. Libya is named as a specific state sponsor of terrorism.

NSS 1997 describes terrorism as a significant threat, referring to it 26 different times. It contains a separate section about terrorism which even foreshadows the Bush doctrine of preemption by stating "we reserve the right to strike at their bases and attack assets valued by those who support them--a right we exercised in 1993 with the attack against Iraqi intelligence headquarters in response to Baghdad's assassination attempt against former President Bush."<sup>11</sup> The terrorist threat is still clearly considered in state terms, with Libya, Iran, Iraq and Sudan named as state terrorism sponsors. The enemy during the 1980's and '90's is defined as specific nations which employ terrorism as a tactic.

NSS 2002 and the National Strategy to Combat Terrorism clearly describe a different enemy. Al Qaeda and other like-minded groups are not instruments of terror wielded by a nation we can target. In an eerie about face Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and other state sponsors of terror are characterized as tools being wielded by a transnational enemy (for sanctuary, recruiting, financing and so on), instead of the other way around. For the first time, terrorism is defined as a stand alone threat, instead of as a tool wielded by rogue nations. Al Qaeda is the model for this enemy, which has leadership and a networked organization spanning the globe. They utilize modern technology and the freedom afforded by expanding globalization to move and communicate.

The first chapter of the NSCT outlines the structure of this new terrorist threat, making the argument that there are three linked levels of terrorist organizations. There are state level terrorist organizations, regional terrorist organizations, and terrorists with global reach.<sup>12</sup> It goes on to state that these groups are linked both through direct cooperation and asset sharing, and indirectly by ideology and common cause. The state and regional threats are not new, and the

global threat grew out of these smaller, more localized threats. The NSCT proposes to defeat the enemy by reversing that process. Quite frankly, it sounds remarkably like a strategy of Containment.

The NSCT states we will fight the enemy sequentially: Global → Regional → National. We begin by engaging the terrorists with global reach everywhere. We will attack “their sanctuaries; leadership; command, control, and communications; material support; and finances.”<sup>13</sup> This global engagement will limit his command and control, which will force him to reconsolidate into regional organizations. We will then cooperate with regional partners to further whittle him down until he is confined to a few specific nation-states. Once we have him within a particular national boundary, we can assist that nation in finishing him off. In fact, what we see here is a version of the Rollback strategy; that particular brand of Containment espoused by the Reagan administration. A Rollback strategy elegantly allows us to fit the GWOT in with the myriad of other, more enduring and traditional security concerns in NSS 2002.

In reality, our global fight consists of engaging the enemy simultaneously in every region. We will overload him in so many different regions that the different regional nodes will be forced to cut global contacts and concentrate on maintaining communication and cooperation within their region. We can then continue to divide those nodes down to the national level of functioning and defeat them in detail. This allows us to utilize the Department of Defense (DOD) and the State Department, our major national security bureaucracies, most efficiently, since they are divided along regional lines. Nominally, the National Security Council (NSC) is responsible for integrating these regional efforts into a global plan by writing a National Campaign Plan for the Global War on Terror (NCP-WOT). Because State still has the lead to develop regional strategies, and DOD continues to do business by Combatant Command, a new NSC plan can only “globalize” our strategy by prioritizing money and resources for different regions.

One might argue that the “global” part of the strategy comes in forming a global coalition to fight the GWOT. Both the NSS 2002 and the NSCT go into more detail than previous strategic documents about the importance of forming an international coalition to defeat a common threat. Much of what we are doing internationally is fundamentally unchanged. Diplomatically, we work through traditional alliances and organizations like the United Nations to denounce global terrorism. We continue traditional Military to Military training like the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, but we alter the training scenarios somewhat; executing a

counterterrorism operation or a Maritime Interception Operation (MIO) aimed against a vessel with a suspected Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD).

There is a certain mindset to this strategy; as Thomas Donnelly points out, "the 'war on terrorism,'...is, in truth, not a global war on all terrorist organizations--so far, the FARC in Colombia and the Irish Republican Army seemed to have escaped much attention from the Bush administration-but principally upon "Islamism," that violent political movement antipathetic to modernity and to the West, and especially to their expression through American power."<sup>14</sup> There is an undeniable moral imperative to hunting down the members of al Qaeda and those we perceive as supporting them. But it fits a mindset that the global jihadist movement has geographic definitions, just as we do. It grew out of a particular region and, in spite of all the talk about global communications and the Internet; the terrorists still occupy some piece of ground somewhere. Regardless of globalization, the enemy is still bound by geography and if we can catch him in a particular spot, we can kill or capture him, and be done with it. We assume that this enemy is akin to the traditional state sponsored terrorists, only bigger. Certainly, our eagerness to concentrate our efforts on two designated major state sponsors of terrorism (Afghanistan and Iraq) is a bigger version of the decision to bomb Libya in retaliation for a terrorist bombing targeting Americans in Europe.

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF GLOBAL TERRORISM**

Tracing the development of modern global terrorism and our reaction to it yields some important lessons about the efficacy of our current strategy. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an extensive review of the history of terrorism, but modern terrorism has mirrored significant social and political changes, beginning in the late 1800's.<sup>15</sup> It has been employed against so-called "interlopers", successively waged to fight 1) empires, 2) colonial powers, and 3) globalization, perceived as a U.S. led international "empire".<sup>16</sup> All of these movements were characterized by a new perception of opportunity with changing political/social systems. Although we often perceive terrorism as rising out of poverty and oppression, modern terrorism is more often associated with decreasing poverty and oppression. The first wave of modern terrorism originated in Russia, where the new concepts of suffrage and political empowerment raised the hopes of the population. The czarist government enacted political and social reforms in response; essentially decreasing government oppression. The combination of rising expectations and decreasing repression spawned terrorist groups which attacked symbolic targets to provoke a popular response that would overturn the established government.<sup>17</sup>

The decolonization of the mid-Twentieth century was responsible for the rise of self determination movements that spawned a new wave of terrorism with political aims. The Soviet Union took advantage of this movement by supporting leftist guerillas and terrorists, which led to the first studies on terrorism as a modern foreign policy issue during the Reagan administration. During the 1970s and 1980s terrorism began to assume an international character. There were a number of factors: the influence of communist ideology as a global ideology, technological innovations and the evolution of an international mass media. Diverse groups with no cultural, geographical or political ties began to develop links for various reasons. After the terrorist massacre of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics, televised around the world, numerous would-be terrorists traveled to the Middle East to receive training on twentieth century terrorist methods from the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).<sup>18</sup> State sponsors like Libya, Iran and Syria supported this growing international network as a useful instrument to conduct attacks on Western and U.S. targets.<sup>19</sup>

These modern terrorist trends began mutating into a truly global threat towards the end of the Cold War. This global phenomenon has gone through three stages: Superpower proxy; Global Business; Franchise operation. None of these stages was predicted and each represents a development toward newer, twenty-first century information age methods of organization. Traditional U.S. instruments of counterterrorist policy have not been successful in breaking down the terrorist organizations into more traditional national groups. Instead, they seem to have facilitated its development towards ever more dispersed, non-hierarchical network organizations.

When Osama bin Laden traveled to Afghanistan in 1982, he was one of many young Arabs determined to take part in the anti-Soviet jihad. Supported by the U.S. to a certain extent with money, training and arms, they played the part of proxies in the Cold War conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The precursor to al Qaeda, Maktab al-Khidamar (MAK) was not founded as a terrorist organization, but rather as a group to organize and track foreign fighters, as well as funneling money into the resistance.<sup>20</sup> Once the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan most of these fighters went home, where many of them had already been affiliated with nationalist and terrorist movements within their respective countries. The end of the Cold War caused most of the groups supported as superpower proxies to decline to the point of either extinction, or absorption into traditional political processes. Not so the MAK, which had not subscribed to an ideology of either the “Left” or the “Right”. Instead, they took with them a new sense of international pan-Islamism (albeit Arab-centric at this point), an informal network

of contacts and the conviction that their jihad had brought down one of the two great superpowers.<sup>21</sup>

Many of these veterans began to see the sole remaining superpower, the U.S., as the prop holding up the corrupt, non-democratic governments in their own countries. Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia, where he came increasingly into conflict with the Saudi government over what he perceived as excessive U.S. presence and interference in Saudi affairs. In 1988 he established a new group, al-Qaeda, made up of the more extreme elements of the MAK. Put under house arrest by the Saudi government, he used family connections to escape, eventually finding sanctuary in Sudan, where he was welcomed by National Islamic Front (NIF) leader, Hassan al-Turabi.<sup>22</sup>

From his new headquarters in Sudan bin Laden began building al-Qaeda into a global terrorist “business” organization. This international network has been exhaustively laid out in the investigations since 9/11. Although al-Qaeda did not conform to a standard hierarchical business model, its loose network was still directed through a rough governing structure. As the CEO, Osama bin Laden provided the vision for the organization, set overall policies and gave final approval for major activities. His two deputies, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Mohammed Atef acted as his closest advisors. Below bin Laden was the “majlis al shura,” a hand picked council that directed the four key committees (military, religious, finance, and media) approved major operations, including terrorist attacks. Paul Smith notes that “al Qaeda acted in a manner somewhat resembling a large charity organization that funded terrorist projects to be conducted by preexisting or affiliate terrorist groups.”<sup>23</sup>

It drew upon financial resources as varied as African diamonds, South American narcotics and Islamic charities. Recruits came from veterans of the Afghan war, and through social networking that drew upon disaffected Muslims all over the world. Alliances were forged through the Afghani network with other, nationally focused terrorist groups in widely dispersed countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Palestine. Its operations varied widely – from sending fighters to Islamic based conflicts such Bosnia and Chechnya, to running training camps for a global clientele. During the ‘90s it underwrote a series of anti-Western terrorist attacks against embassies, a U.S. naval vessel and the initial World Trade Center bombing of 1993, finally culminating with the attacks of 9/11.

#### **U.S. STRATEGY APPLIED: COMBATING GLOBAL TERRORISM**

Al-Qaeda was known to be a serious threat to U.S. interests long before 9/11 and the U.S. employed many of its traditional tools of national power to interdict and destroy the organization.

In January 1995 a Presidential Executive Order declared al-Qaeda a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). A further Executive Order in 1998 named bin Laden a Specially Designated Terrorist (SDT), along with two identified associates, Rifai Taha Musa and Abu Hafs al-Masri (Mohammad Atef)<sup>24</sup>. These orders authorized various legal options, such as freezing any associated assets identified in the U.S. and banning financial transactions with businesses linked to bin Laden. All three named SDTs were indicted as terrorists and subject to international law enforcement agreements to be extradited and tried in U.S. courts. A \$5 million reward was offered for the capture of Atef. The U.S. used diplomatic means to persuade other countries to cut off sources of al-Qaeda financing, with no discernible results. Diplomatic efforts had a slightly more successful result when Sudan expelled bin Laden in 1996, although he quickly found new sanctuary in Afghanistan. A subsequent executive order froze \$254 million of Taliban money in U.S. banks, but they refused to extradite him.

In August 1998 the U.S. tried military pressure through retaliatory strikes on an Afghan camp where bin Laden was thought to reside and a Sudanese pharmaceutical plant suspected of chemical weapons experimentation. These strikes constituted the first instance of U.S. retaliation against a group, not a state sponsor; representing a significant change in U.S. counterterrorism policy.<sup>25</sup> However, in the CRS report on terrorism published on September 10, 2001, Kenneth Katzman states what becomes horribly obvious a day later: "The 1998 air strikes against bin Laden did not prompt the Taliban leadership to extradite or expel him from Afghanistan, nor did the strikes deter bin Laden's network from engaging in further terrorist activities."<sup>26</sup>

The attacks of September 11 constitute al-Qaeda's crowning achievement. They also made it clear that we had fundamentally misunderstood the type of globalized threat we now faced. It concentrated U.S. resolve into an overwhelming response that included the most extreme sort of sanction of two designated state sponsors; invasion and regime change. Fifteen of the 37 designated top al-Qaeda operatives have been killed or captured and almost 3,000 al-Qaeda operatives have been detained by about 90 countries. International financial cooperation has frozen about \$77 million dollars of suspected al-Qaeda financial assets worldwide.<sup>27</sup> Al-Qaeda as an international business organization with a central organizing function has ceased to exist. Although its two top operatives, bin Laden and al Zawahiri remain at large, their leadership is no longer relevant to the activities of the global terrorist network. In response to the worldwide effort that dismantled al-Qaeda's central leadership global terrorism has mutated once again into a system of franchise operations.<sup>28</sup>

In business parlance, a franchise is a business established or operated under an authorization to sell or distribute a company's goods or services in a particular area.<sup>29</sup> It entails a combination of individual ownership and central control. Independent businesses enter into an agreement with a manufacturer or service organization for the right to own and operate units in the franchise system. Al-Qaeda's structure was always based upon a loose network of Afghan Arabs. Its membership consisted of both small cells of operators and affiliation with pre-existing groups whose aims were national or regional. In 1998, bin Laden formed an umbrella organization called "The Islamic World Front for the Struggle Against the Jews and Crusaders." This organization included signatories from Egyptian groups al-Gamaa al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad, Jihad movement in Bangladesh, the Pakistani group Jamiat ul-Ulema e-Pakistan and a bin Laden formed Saudi group called the Advice and Reform Committee.<sup>30</sup> Since the declaration of the GWOT, a wide variety of groups have been linked to Al-Qaeda through either public declaration or international intelligence findings.<sup>31</sup> These "affiliates...are homegrown, organic Islamist terror groups with nationalist objectives."<sup>32</sup>

Al-Qaeda is no longer an organization; it is a brand name. Tony Karon noted in Time Magazine that "'al-Qaeda,' the name describes a broad franchise of terrorist jihad against the U.S. and its allies adopted by scores of local Islamist groups."<sup>33</sup> During the years that the GWOT coalition has been hunting and dismantling Al-Qaeda's central organization, these groups have not been idle. Inspired by the brand of global jihad, they have conducted a series of deadly attacks across the globe; from Madrid to Casablanca, through Istanbul, Riyadh and Baghdad, to Bali and Jakarta. Many of these groups predate al Qaeda and have specific regional or national agendas. They do not directly communicate or overtly coordinate their attacks. It is tempting to argue that, absent a coherent al Qaeda organizational network, these groups are really only bound together through ideology. Under this theory, one could conclude that franchising into nationalist groups is precisely what the NSCT predicts – the U.S. is successfully whittling down the global network into its component regional and state groups. There is no doubt that Islamist jihad is a powerful ideological phenomenon, but it is only one aspect of the global terrorist network and making it the central organizing concept is perhaps more a result of a Cold War mentality than of the reality.

The Cold War was portrayed as an epic clash of two ideologies – Western democracy versus Communism. Section IV of NSC 68 was entitled "The Underlying Conflict in the Realm of Ideas and Values between the U.S. Purpose and the Kremlin Design", and it argued that the basic conflict was between ideas – "the idea of freedom under a government of laws, and the idea of slavery under the grim oligarchy of the Kremlin."<sup>34</sup> The adversary resided in the Soviet

Union and violence in other regions in the world – including terrorist violence - was exported from or used by this center of communism. Today, the war of ideas is Western democracy versus Salafi Islam. Al Qaeda is the main enemy, with our main effort targeted to a particular geographic region - the Middle East, where undemocratic, repressive regimes represent the center of the opposing ideology. This is oversimplified, but there is some merit in such a mental picture.

It is instructive to remember that we did not win the Cold War by winning the war of ideologies. We drove the Soviet Union out of business and their material support to terrorist groups and client state sponsors of terrorists dried up. The ideology of communism was subsequently discredited, but there are two important points to make about this. First, very few terrorist groups or insurgencies which claimed some connection to communism or received support from the Soviet Union ceased operations because communism was discredited. These groups were symptoms of the “anti-colonialism” wave of Post-World War II, not of the struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Second, in the eyes of much of the world, discrediting communism did not validate democracy.

Following in this Cold War (or maybe it would be more accurate to call it a uniquely American) mindset, Military theorists whose study of the adversary follows traditional military thinking – identifying a group, studying leaders, and so on, have increasingly begun to tout “Islamist ideology” as the Center of Gravity for the GWOT.<sup>35</sup> Echevarria states that “....the war against global terrorism is foremost a battle of ideas—ideas powerful enough to provoke violent emotions. Consequently, it is within this arena that the war will be won or lost.”<sup>36</sup> Eloquent words, but the reality is that the ideas justify the violent impulse, they do not provoke it. There are two unspoken assumptions that drive this sort of debate in the West: First, that political Islam is monolithic and second, that it is inherently violent.<sup>37</sup> Political Islam is a modern phenomenon and, although the Western observer may perceive it as generally all “Islamic”, Muslim scholars like Mohammed Ayoob argue that “it is the local context that has largely determined the development and transformation of Islamist movements within particular national milieus. Moreover, it is not true that Islamist political formations have been primarily violent in nature. The most long-standing and credible Islamist parties have normally worked within the legal frameworks in which they have found themselves.”<sup>38</sup> Instead of being monolithic, Political Islam is defined by national and local circumstances and shows as much diversity as the world’s Muslim population itself. Wahhabism and Salafism, which are commonly cited as violent ideologies, do not advocate violence. Moreover, their practice varies in different regions.<sup>39</sup>

There is no single ideology to be discredited and even the groups which advocate violence justify it with an interpretation that is location and context specific.

The particular brand of Salafism preached by al Qaeda was as much inspired by Marxist-Leninist revolutionary ideas as it was by Islam. The movement's founding ideology derives from Egyptian revolutionary Sayyid Qutb and Abu Ala Maududi of Pakistan, who were influenced by the organizational tactics of secular leftist and anarchist revolutionaries. Their concept of the vanguard is influenced by Leninist theory. Qutb's most famous work, "Milestones", has been likened to an Islamicized Communist Manifesto.<sup>40</sup> The terrorists have often named grievances that are far more anti-global in nature than they are religious. One of bin Laden's recent documents cites the United States' failure to ratify the Kyoto agreement on climate change. Ayman al-Zawahiri has decried multinational companies as a major evil and Mohammed Atta once told a friend that he was angry at a world economic system that meant Egyptian farmers grew cash crops such as strawberries for the West while the country's own people could barely afford bread.<sup>41</sup>

The Jihadist terrorists use Salafi Islam as a religious frame for modern political concerns, including social justice. They do not reject modernization; they resent their failure to benefit from it. This fits the classic pattern of increasing opportunity and changing political systems that generated waves of terror in response to empire building and colonization. There is no doubt that bin Laden and the fundamentalist groups which look to him for inspiration are dedicated to restoring traditional Shari'a law and conservative Islamic rule to Muslim countries. But the underlying grievances are not about religion, they are about power and opportunity. Dr. Radu, writing about the root causes of Islamist terrorism, commented that "Islamist terrorism, just as its Marxist or secessionist version in the West and Latin America was, is a matter of power—who has it and how to get it."<sup>42</sup> This is not to minimize the power of the religious message, or the importance of supporting the growth of democracy in the Middle East. But it is important to understand that global terrorism is not about Islam; it is about the social conditions connected with globalization.

Al Qaeda – the organization – was a bridge between Industrial Age and Information Age terrorism. Al Qaeda – the brand – is one manifestation of a new form of terrorism that is irrevocably global. We know this – both NSS and NSCT discuss the importance of globalization. But we persist in believing it is merely a technological enablement, rather than a fundamental characteristic. The NSCT states that "Modern technology has enabled terrorists to plan and operate worldwide as never before. With advanced telecommunications they can coordinate their actions among dispersed cells while remaining in the shadows. Today's

terrorists increasingly enjoy a force-multiplier effect by establishing links with other like-minded organizations around the globe.<sup>43</sup> The implication is if the franchise in Malaysia is not phoning or emailing the franchise in Algeria, then they must not be global terrorists unless they are directly connected by technology.

The fact is that they do not need to communicate directly, or even know much about each other, any more than the hashish customer in Amsterdam needs to know about the grower in Bolivia to be part of the same global drug network. The global network is comprised of both local franchises which tend to attack Western targets on their home turf, and internationalist contingents which may target far from their place of origin. These cells are composed of a second generation which may have traveled to Afghanistan in the 1990s, or participated in Jihads in places like Bosnia and Chechnya. Most of these young internationalists came from the West.<sup>44</sup> They had moved to western countries with their families or as students. Some were born in western countries. They adopted a western lifestyle and were not particularly religious. Members of the internationalist contingent rarely return to their home countries. As one example, no European Algerians who joined the jihad movement have been identified as returning to Algeria to join the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). They did go to take part in peripheral jihad - in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya and even Kashmir, but they returned to Europe. "Most of the operatives in Europe...can be better defined now as part of the European Jihadi milieu....the GSPC European network ranks among the most active terrorist networks in the world."<sup>45</sup>

Marc Sageman, who developed a model of the different terror networks responsible for the major Western targeted attacks – to include 11 September – demonstrated how the network was composed of nodes that formed spontaneously, through social bonding. They stretched across regions, were not constrained by nationality or borders and were not the product of poverty and ignorance. Instead, he says "They were ...upwardly mobile compared to their parents...Underemployed and discriminated against by the local society, they felt a personal sense of grievance and humiliation. They sought a cause that would give them emotional relief, social community...Although they did not start out particularly religious; there was a shift in their devotion before they joined the global jihad, which gave them both a cause and comrades."<sup>46</sup>



As the links between the Middle East and transnational terrorism become more and more dispersed, its global nature becomes clearer. Other groups and individuals which are fundamentally antiglobal are beginning to identify with the jihadists. Neo-Nazis, White Supremacists, Identity Christians and former communist radicals have applauded the jihadists and urged followers to join forces.<sup>47</sup> One of the premier terrorists of the Cold War, Carlos the Jackal, has converted to Islam and now espouses the cause of anti-Western Jihad.<sup>48</sup> The truck bomb tactic Timothy McVeigh used to destroy a government building in Oklahoma was perfected in Lebanon. The use of roadside improvised explosive devices (IED), tested in Iraq, and has become a very successful terrorist tactic being employed by Maoist insurgents in Nepal.<sup>49</sup>

Terrorist financing is a global network of both illegal and legal businesses, financial assistance from state agents, criminal activities and donations.<sup>50</sup> Terrorists and other criminal offspring of globalization meet in areas like the tri-border region connecting Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay to make connections and “swap tradecraft”.<sup>51</sup> Terrorism is increasingly exhibiting a freedom from the constraints of either state or region. Instead, it exists in a transnational milieu, divorced from state-driven ideology or constraints. Terrorist groups have begun to exhibit the same characteristics of the other negative aspects of globalization that Moises Naim characterizes as the 5 Wars of Globalization - illegal trade in drugs, arms, intellectual property, people, and money.

Naim points out that the struggle to overcome all of these negative outcomes “pits governments against agile, stateless, and resourceful networks empowered by globalization. Governments will continue to lose these wars until they adopt new strategies to deal with a larger, unprecedented struggle that now shapes the world as much as confrontations between nation-states once did.”<sup>52</sup> He argues that they all exhibit fundamental changes that are persistent, transnational, incredibly flexible and immune to traditional government solutions. The global networks have four characteristics: They are not bound by geography; They defy traditional notions of sovereignty; They pit governments against market forces; and they pit bureaucracies against networks.<sup>53</sup> Naim’s analysis, like that of other observers of globalization and terrorism, highlights that the fundamental challenge lies not in crafting a strategy that is nationally or regionally based. Instead, it is the networks that span regions and nations, making them marginal or irrelevant, that are the challenge of the twenty first century.

## CONCLUSION

To summarize the evidence, our national strategy to combat terrorism has strategic roots tracing all the way back to our national strategy to contain the Soviet Union. Changes to our strategy have been incremental and evolutionary. We developed our strategy within a geostrategic, regionally based paradigm that provides continuity. Our declaration that global terrorism is the number one threat is certainly different; unforeseen before 9/11. But our analysis of that threat and how to deal with it conforms to earlier views of combating terrorism, differing mainly in the matter of scope of the problem. Finally, our organization to combat the new threat evolved, with incremental changes, from our organization to combat the Soviet Union. The gradual development of our current national strategy is reassuring in the sense that it demonstrates that our fundamental world view is consistent and largely unchanged. Our national purpose, founded on principles like individual freedom and economic prosperity, still guides our relationships with other nations. For better or for worse, our assumption that the world would be a better place if everyone lived by these values continues to guide us.

More troubling is the evidence that our strategy to combat terrorism is also less changed than we believe. Instead of debating the revolutionary differences of our CT strategy, strategists ought to be examining and debating its evolutionary sameness. We can clearly see how it is rooted in a philosophy of Containment. The similarities to Reagan era doctrine, when terrorism first appeared as a concern, are especially strong. Our CT strategy really seems to be an updated version of the Containment and Rollback strategy of the 1980s. Containment may have worked well against the Soviet Union, but there is no evidence that was ever successful against terrorists. Even in examples that might be cited to portray success, it was clearly a different enemy – nation states employing terrorism as a tactic.

Finally, our organization to combat terrorism is changing, but in ways that allow us to expand our current strategy, instead of changing it. The creation of the Department of Homeland Security is a very significant restructuring of the government to execute the new strategy. By forming a DHS we can most efficiently include the territorial United States as a new region in our strategy. Traditionally, defense of the Homeland has not been a part of our national security strategy. Now that we feel threatened, we have made our country its own region and put someone in charge of it. This is certainly original, but it quarantines Homeland security concerns so that we can continue doing business as usual everywhere else in the world. The NSCT specifically states that it only “focuses on identifying and defusing threats before they reach our borders.”<sup>54</sup> The rest of our national security structures can continue unchanged. We might add a little; State now has a counterterrorism bureau and the JCS has

added a GWOT section to its J5, headed by a brigadier general. But these are bureaucratic additions, not fundamental changes.

We define the global terrorist jihadists as a fundamentally different enemy. They combine corrupted ancient beliefs with modern technology. They are organized in an information age network structure and are configured to conduct a new type of warfare termed Netwar. Yet we assume that, if we pressure this enemy in multiple regions around the world, they will return to more traditional modes of operation on smaller scales, confined to ever smaller areas, eventually nations, where they can be completely eradicated. This is fundamentally unchanged from our notions of how to combat state sponsored terrorism. The evidence of the last few years indicates that the enemy will not “de-globalize”, but will evolve into something else, continuing to operate globally. We need to understand the traditional assumptions of terrorism that drive our strategy and define a new way ahead. It is time to operationalize and test a practical model of a networked enemy conducting Netwar, and develop a truly revolutionary strategy to combat the enemy of the “now and future”, not the “now and past”.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert Kagan analyzes the larger scope of Bush's foreign policy in his editorial *A Higher Realism*, Washington Post, January 23, 2005, Sec. B p 7.

<sup>2</sup> George W. Bush, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America", (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002), 3.

<sup>3</sup> George W. Bush, *Second Inauguration Speech*, January 23, 2005, p 1.

<sup>4</sup> R. Craig Nation, "Regional Studies and Global Strategy", in *U.S. Army War College Guide to Strategy*, ed. Joseph R. Cerami and James F. Holcomb, Jr., February 2001, 69, available from <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army-usawc/strategy/>; Internet, accessed October 8, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Don M. Snider and John A. Nagl, "The National Security Strategy: Documenting Strategic Vision", in *U.S. Army War College Guide to Strategy*, ed. Joseph R. Cerami and James F. Holcomb, Jr., February 2001, 131, available from <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army-usawc/strategy/>; Internet, accessed October 8, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald R. Reagan, "Address to the Members of the British Parliament". London, England, 8 June 1982. Available from <<http://www.geocities.com/rickmatlick/doctrinereagan.htm>>; Internet, accessed 24 September 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Snider and Nation, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Bush, *National Security Strategy*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> George W. Bush, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, February 2003), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Global Domination or Global Leadership* (Perseus Books Group, 2004), 477.

<sup>11</sup> William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, May 1997), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Bush, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>14</sup> Donnelly, Thomas, *The Underpinnings of the Bush Doctrine* National Security Outlook AEI Online, (February 2003), <http://www.cdi.org/friendlyversion/printversion.cfm?documentID=1502>; Internet, accessed February 18, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Cindy C. Combs presents a concise overview of the historical phenomenon of terrorism in *Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall, 2003), pg 20.

<sup>16</sup> Cronin, Audrey Kurth, *Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism* International Security, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Winter 2002/03), 34.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Burgess, *A Brief History of Terrorism* Center for Defense Initiatives, July, 2003, <http://www.cdi.org/friendlyversion/printversion.cfm?documentID=1502>; Internet, accessed February 18, 2005, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Smith, *transnational Terrorism and the Al-Qaeda Model; Confronting New Realities Parameters, 2002*, 35.

<sup>21</sup> Usamah bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu-Yasir Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, Mir Hamzah and Fazlur Rahman. "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders" World Islamic Front Statement, 23 February 1998: available from <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>; Internet, accessed February 18, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War: Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 79.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Smith, 36.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Terrorism: Near Eastern Groups and State Sponsors, 2001* Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, September 10, 2001, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Raphael F. Perl, *Terrorism: U. S. Response to Bombings in Kenya and Tanzania: A New Policy Direction?* (Congressional Research Institute Report to Congress, September, 1998) p

<sup>26</sup> Katzman, 32.

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Al-Qaeda: Profile and Threat Assessment* Congressional Research Institute Report to Congress, February 10, 2005, 5.

<sup>28</sup> A number of descriptive terms have been used in recent literature, but I attribute the term "Franchise Operations" and its description to Brigadier General Rick Zahner. As the EUCOM J2, BG Zahner was pointing out the phenomenon in early 2003, while most observers were still concentrating on the al-Qaeda network itself.

<sup>29</sup> Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, (Springfield, MA, Merriam-Webster Inc. 2001), 462.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Schanzer, *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror* (Washington, D.C., The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004), 25.

<sup>31</sup> For an in depth list and description of groups see U.S. State Department *Global Patterns of Terrorism 2003*, April, 2004, Appendix B, 113.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>33</sup> Tony Karon, *Why the Qaeda Threat is Growing* Time Magazine, March 17, 2004, 2.

<sup>34</sup> National Security Council. *NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security*. (Washington D.C.: National Security Council, April 14, 1950), 2.

<sup>35</sup> Even a cursory review of various War College writings reveals this trend. See, for example, James Reilly's Strategy Research Project, *A Strategic Level Center of Gravity Analysis on the Global War on Terrorism*, April 9, 2002; Joseph Schweitzer's *Al-Qaeda: Center of Gravity and Decisive Points*, April 4, 2003; or Joe Etheridge's *Center of Gravity Determination in the Global War on Terrorism*, May 4 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria III, *Globalization and the Nature of War* Strategic Studies Institute Monograph, Carlisle, PA, U.S. Army War College, March 2003, available at <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi/pdffiles/PUB215.pdf>; Internet, accessed February 18, 2005, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, *Political Islam: Image and Reality* World Policy Journal, Fall 2004, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>40</sup> Jason Burke, *Think Again: Al Qaeda Foreign Policy*, May/June 2004, available at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=2536&print=1](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=2536&print=1); Internet, accessed February 18, 2005, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Radu. "Futile Search for the Root Causes of Islamic Terrorism" *Foreign Policy Research Institute* April 23 2002 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/americawar.20020423.radu.futilesearchforrootcauses.html>; Internet; accessed February 20, 2005, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>44</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia, PA University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 92.

<sup>45</sup> Schanzer, 111.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>47</sup> Jessica Stern, *Terror in The Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, (New York, NY, Harper Collins Inc., 2003), 275.

<sup>48</sup> Amir Taheri, *The Axis of Terror*, The Weekly Standard, Vol. 9 Iss. 14 November 24, 2003, available at <http://www.benadorassociates.com/article/700>; Internet, accessed February 20, 2005, 2.

<sup>49</sup> BG Paban Thapa, Nepalese Armed Forces, "Nepal", Seminar presentation, Carlisle Barracks, PA, U.S. Army War College, January 2005, cited with permission of BG Thapa.

<sup>50</sup> Stern, 272.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>52</sup> Moises Naim, *The 5 Wars of Globalization*, Foreign Policy, Jan/Feb 2004, available at <http://www.foreignpolicy.com>; Internet, accessed February 20, 2005, 29.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>54</sup> Schanzer, 2.

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